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Resident rips Griffith plant on chemicals

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GRIFFITH — Charges of excessive chemicals from American Chemical Co. entering the town's sewer system were made by southside crusader George Milne at the Town Board meeting Tuesday night.

Also, he gave a verbal and pictorial description of a soil-erosion problem where hazardous wastes are buried at the chemical plant on South Colfax Street.

Milne's complaint of a stench rising from water in drainage ditches near the chemical solvent recycling company was confirmed by Town Board member L. E. Owen.

"The fumes were strong yesterday," Owen said in reference to his inspection of the site on Monday with director of public works Glen V. Reyome.

During the inspection, Reyome took a sample of drainage ditch water for chemical analysis. He said the laboratory analysis with detailed recommendations should be ready within three weeks.

Reyome and Owen concurred that the smell there was "oily and different."

Citing statistics from two different chemical analyses done on water samples taken at American Chemical, Milne said there is a problem with acidity and 17 "very, very toxic chemicals."

The laboratory reports aren't recent, as one was on a sample taken Aug. 27-28 in 1979 and the other on a sample taken March 13, 1981.

Milne noted the March 13 sample had a pH of 3.8, meaning it was highly acidic and outside of the acceptable pH range of 4.5 to 9.5.

"In time, if we don't do something, our sewers will be eaten out," Milne stated, alluding to his experience as a plumber.

While the pH on the Aug. 27-28, 1979 sample was well within the acceptable range, the amounts of oils and greases and biochemical oxygen demand were "way high," Milne added.

He urged the Town Board to impose fines against American Chemical when chemical analysis indicates the firm is violating town ordinances with excessive chemicals.

A town ordinance calls for the company to monitor its chemical disposal itself and send monthly reports to the town, Reyome related. Milne said he contacted the Environmental Protection Agency and found out that in six to 12 months chemical companies will also have to submit reports to the EPA.

The Hammond Sanitary District, which treats Griffith's sewage, reportedly tests the effluent contents for excessive chemicals. However, because the testing is done where the Griffith sewers end on the far northern end of town and American Chemical is at the southern end, any chemicals it might be disposing of in the sewer system would be greatly diluted by the time they reached the sampling point, Reyome said.

Regarding the erosion, Milne said this chemical dumpsite was to be covered with clay and planted with grass. Rainfall has eroded a sloped area to the point where there is a gaping hole several feet deep and probably measuring about four feet in width and depth, Milne related.

He suggested this area at least be fenced for the safety of any children who might be playing in the area.

Odor problems stemming from the chemical company aren't new.

In August 1975, stench then described as "giant body odor" and "cat litter" was found to be coming from two 100-by-200-foot areas where American Chemical was reportedly dumping chemical waste.

The town filled in the area with sand, although one town trustee urged that the material be dug out and hauled away so it couldn't plague the town in the future.

In the wake of the 1975 odor problem, American Chemical agreed to dispose of barrels of chemical waste through a private scavenger.